EDITORIAL

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The Editors Introduce the April 2026 Issue

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Notes from Editor-in-Chief Jeanne-Louise Moys. Welcome to the first of three issues in volume 60. We would first like to pay tribute to all the editors, authors, reviewers, copyeditors, and designers who have contributed to *Visible Language* over the years and enabled us to meet this milestone of 60 years of publishing.

As a milestone year, it seems apt to open with David Preston's (2026) article, "The Terminological Development of Graphic Design." You, our readers, will have different views of the range of practices and sensibilities the term *graphic design* encompasses and whether it is still apt to describe how the profession and its artifacts have evolved. Many researchers, practitioners, and educators use alternative terms, such as *communication design* or *user-centered design,* instead of *graphic design*. Nevertheless, the term often seems to be more readily familiar to the general public and new undergraduates, even though their associations may lie more with advertising and branding applications than the range of visual practices and contexts designers and researchers engage with. Revisiting the roots of the term and how its usage has evolved is important to inform our current understanding of what we do as researchers, educators, and practitioners.

Notes from Editor Mike Zender. Alice Savoie, Kai Bernau, Wayne Daly, Raphaela Haefliger, and Sebastian Baez-Lugo's (2026) article, "Automation and Artificial Intelligence in the Type Design Process," reports on three research questions: how the type design industry is being impacted by AI, what risks and opportunities experts perceive,

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and how designers and computer scientists can collaboratively address ethics and quality (p. 26). In the body of the article, the authors add a fourth question: "what parts of their process" are designers "willing to delegate to a machine, and which parts are considered as meaningful, enjoyable, or highly dependent on human intervention?" (p. 33). They studied these questions through an online interview asking about *current practice and expectations* and *propensity to automate specific tasks.* The results they describe are interesting and offer a glimpse into the possibilities for AI in design beyond just typeface design.

Questioning by Mike Zender. As interesting as the author's questions are, relevant questions not directly considered are equally interesting: to what extent are concerns about AI in type design the result of negativity bias; do we know enough about visual letterform concepts to create AI that can do more than mimic existing typefaces; what parameters define an excellent typeface design? That last question about quality is addressed by Savoie et al. (2026) obliquely, writing that some AI generated typefaces are "…rudimentary in their design, often encompassing only capital letters, and displaying obvious flaws" (p. 29). What precisely constitutes "rudimentary" and what the "flaws" are is not discussed, but these seem to be highly relevant questions for AI in type design or any kind of design, as are the metrics for making such judgments. This gets to a key issue about visual design: what exactly constitutes "good quality." How will we know when an AI assisted or produced design is inadequate?

Through surveys and interviews, the authors expose the interesting quandary of machine learning from copyrighted material, as if human typeface designers generate their typefaces without having been influenced or "inspired" by existing letterforms, copyrighted or not. It is easy to fault a dumb machine, unable to defend itself, for doing what you have always done.

Intellectual property and creative control are two additional interesting issues explored in the article, along with the potential for AI to "function less as an autonomous designer and more as a brainstorming companion" (p. 45). This would parallel military applications of AI in such products as the "loyal wingman" of multiple unpiloted autonomous aircraft as companions for a single piloted warfighter.

Finally, the authors explore the idea that use of AI to assist in technical or repetitive tasks such as optimizing and kerning adoption also risks affecting "the very routines through which expertise is acquired" (p. 49). They quote one respondent saying,

> …only doing something repeatedly makes you good at it and allows you to create novel and truly innovative things. Without that learning, it is difficult to imagine something amazing being developed. But if AI does all the generic work, how can anybody learn the skills that make a good designer? (p. 49)

Might machine learning for design make designers dumber? Will efficiency cause us to learn less? These issues and more are exposed and explored, in at least a provisional way, in this fascinating and informative article, making it well worth reading.

Notes from Editor Matthew Peterson. Szabolcs Vatány, Thi Huyen Nguyen, Anikó Illés, and Ann Bessemans (2026) address rather subtle differentiations of hover states for text highlighting in their article, "Evaluating Interactive Highlighting Techniques in Digital Reading." Reading research has been an emphasis of *Visible Language* since its inception, and Vatány and colleagues continue that tradition. Text display technology changes rapidly and continuously, and so do readers, so we need scholars such as these to study reading, and to keep studying reading.

In addition to the above three new peer reviewed research articles, this first issue of Volume 60 includes a reprint of a 1982 article by Douglas Hofstadter, itself in reaction to another 1982 article by Donald Knuth, both in *Visible Language*'s 16th volume. I need not introduce it, as my colleague (and *Visible Language* editor) Mike Zender does so in an editorial preceding the reprint. I will simply note that it all centers on Knuth's Meta-Font, which raised issues about artificial intelligence long before the present moment. The reprint is followed by my colleague (and associate editor) Deborah Littlejohn's summary of letters published in Issue 60.4, which were solicited along with Hofstadter's original article, in reaction to Knuth's Meta-Font. I am not certain how many nested levels of *meta* this makes, but it is certainly a few.

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